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THE CONSOLE.

One of the most important details, both in ancient and modern architecture, is the Console. Its design is to unite the corona and crowning members of the cornice with others below it, by supporting the former. This definition would indeed be applicable to any projecting bed-moulding, the difference between it and the console consisting in this that the former has only to support certain points and generally appears in rows at regular intervals, as for example in the case of a cornice or corbel-table, while the projecting bed-moulding of a cornice forms a continuous support. But the advantage derived by consoles over projecting mouldings lies in this, that they allow a greater projection without any fear of their being tilted over in consequence of too great a weight. We shall see, as we proceed, how this advantage is further increased by an ingenious lightening of the superincumbent weight.

The shape of the Console is determined by what it has to support, whether cornice, parapet or arch, pillar or statue, and whether heavy or light. It is further determined by the character and proportions of the building to which it belongs, and by its position in the upper or lower part of the building. Lastly, it is differently treated, though under the same circumstances, in different periods of art, and expressly and peculiarly determined by the material of which it is made. We find consoles in every kind of material, in stone, brick, stucco, wood, iron, zinc, etc., and sometimes imitations in decorative painting.

Instead of making any further theoretical observations on the possible forms of the Console, we will follow its origin and development in the history of architecture, beginning with the Greek, who in this, as in other departments of Art, have given the purest and

most beautiful expression to this prominent feature of architectural ornament. It is not determined to what people the Console in its most perfect form is to be attributed, to the Greeks, Romans or Tuscans. That it was well known to all these three nations seems certain, since it was an indispensable piece of woodwork among even the Indians and Chinese, and other ancient nations, and only not found among the Egyptians. This is to be attributed to the especial origin of the Console in carpentry, its prototype being the wooden bracket, which sometimes appears in the form of a projecting beam-end or rafter, and sometimes under hammer-beams in roofs.

The classical and simplest form of the Console, viz., the dentils, which however scarcely gives expression to its intention, originated in Asia Minor and owes its existence to the scanty wood material of that country. The ornamental and elegant carpentry formed from them became the model of the dentiled or toothed moulding. From Asia Minor this form was introduced into Greece where it was elaborated with great intelligence; but it is doubtful whether a transition from the more modest dentil band to a regular row of consoles took place here, as the national Grecian woodwork, namely the Doric would exclude it altogether. Equally doubtful is it if the Consoles came from the Tuscans who excelled in woodwork, and to whom it might have been suggested by their carved projecting rafter-ends from which these forms would have made an easy, transition to the horizontal bracket or Console. But we find the Console employed with greater predilection, and in more perfect form among the inheritors of the civilisation of these two nations, among the Romans, i. e., to whom therefore their invention must properly be attributed.

Let us now pass on to the consideration of single examples, beginning with the simplest, viz., the dentil-band. This (fig. 1) consists of a row of rectangular, carved, lath-ends in close juxta position and forms in the Ionic and Roman Doric entablature the most prominent member in the bed-moulding serving for transition and support between frieze and corona, while above and below it succeeds a small cymatium, ovalo or torus. Vitruvius gives rules for the dentil-band which however are only applicable to few examples. Breadth of front = half the height; projection = height; interval = $\frac{2}{3}$ of height.

The examination of ancient models shows on the contrary that in the Ionic specimens of Asia Minor in the best period the dentils are decidedly resembling consoles, i. e., the projection is $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the height; that in the Grecian, where principally the Corinthian style made use of the dentil-band, and only small and high specimens are known to us, the dentils are much higher, and in the Roman the height is equal to or greater than the projection. In the Grecian examples the breadth of the dentils is very much smaller than their height; in the Roman this is, to their disadvantage, not always the case. The intervals too show different dimensions, and were as much as possible undercut and hollowed in order to lighten the weight of the cornice.

What the dentil-band produced but imperfectly and merely as a decoration, the Console effected in the most decided manner. At first it appeared in the simple form of a rectangular carved beam-end, with this single peculiarity, that the upper supporting member is carried round it, having on its lower part a more or less ornamented carved work, fig. 2. The distance of the Consoles from each other is equal to their projection so that the intervening lower surfaces or soffits of the corona are square. These suspended parts of the cornice are also rendered lighter in appearance by a sunk panel ornamented by a small flower. This primary form of the Console is found in the works of the early Roman and later Greek periods, and as their character would lead us to expect, among buildings of some loftiness. Their projections therefore are not so prominent and the distances between them not so great as in later times. Besides this rectangular form which is sometimes seen unaccompanied by the dentil-band there is found also the simple curve of the *cyma* and *cyma reversa* used for Consoles in buildings of colossal dimensions and of a simple and solid character.

From these two principal forms proceeded the well known double spiral console enriched by an acanthus leaf, fig. 3. In this form it expresses in the most ingenious and exquisite manner the function of the Console. Its form, as the double spiral, is entirely self supported and only fastened, as it were, to the wall by the back of its hinder volute; the front one which need not be so strong as the other turned in inverse direction towards the upper part, while the band which connects

the two forms almost a straight line. From a solid centre, forming the eye of the volute, extends the spiral scroll in due concentration and extension, honey-suckle ornament springing from both corners of the scroll fills up the empty space; commonly also an acanthus leaf springing from the back clings closely to the under side of the Console. The front of the smaller volute contracting towards the middle is characterised by bold baluster-like swellings and rings of mouldings on both sides, more or less ornamented with foliage, bead-rolls, etc., the crowning member of the console standing a little back behind the edge of the corona.

For the design of the spirals Vitruvius gives a geometrical process, but the specimens we have shew them more freely designed.

What prevents us from attributing the invention of this form of the console to the Romans, with whose Corinthian cornices it almost always occurs, while we find no cornice console in any good period of Grecian art, is the early appearance of the spiral motive in the Ionic capitals, as well as the occurrence of the upright spiral consoles as supports to the crowning cornice of the door so early as in the Erechtheum at Athens, a work of the time of Pericles when Roman architecture was in its infancy. This Console, fig. 4, is of wonderful beauty; its volutes have an unusual boldness and fulness with a great number of turnings. Both volutes of the console are almost equal in size, the upper one a little larger and touching the perpendicular wall, the lower one standing a little off is furnished with a small acanthus leaf at the angle, forming transition to the straight perpendicular wall. The great acanthus leaf, usually covering the front, is wanting, as it would interfere in an incongruous way with the main lines and swelling of the console. Instead of this an inverted honey-suckle ornament springs from the back of the upper spiral. The Console which does not diminish in breadth towards the lower end supports instead of the corona a narrow oblique fillet or band surmounted by a cymatium.

The most ancient Roman console of this kind with which we are acquainted, that of the temple at Cora, is not marked by the same expression of strenght as this, but is unusually slender and extended, its volutes are of very different sizes and its back very narrow.

The Roman horizontal cornice Console undergoes similar modifications. At first its form approached that at the Erechtheum, though rather more extended (fig. 3); then the volutes were of very different sizes, the number of turnings smaller and the connecting band slanting upwards. At the period of exuberant decoration every little surface of the Console was filled up, especially the flutings or channels, with rich ornamentation, though the forms were common place and meaningless, all the painted ornament being transformed into carving. The dentil-band which accompanied the Console cornice, and were at

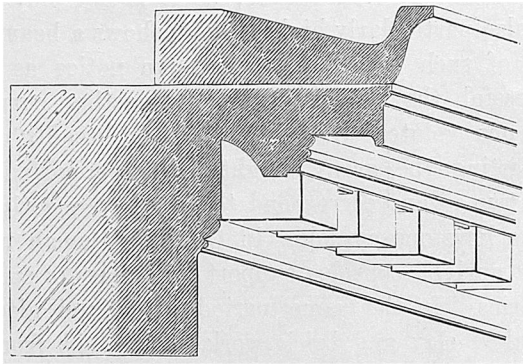


Fig. 1.

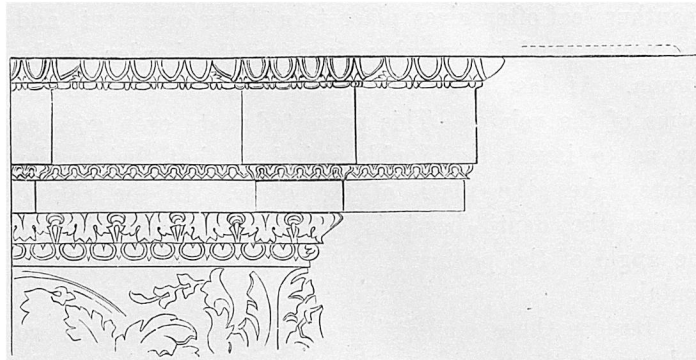


Fig. 2.

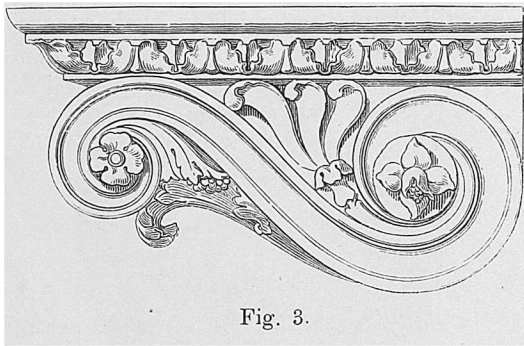


Fig. 3.

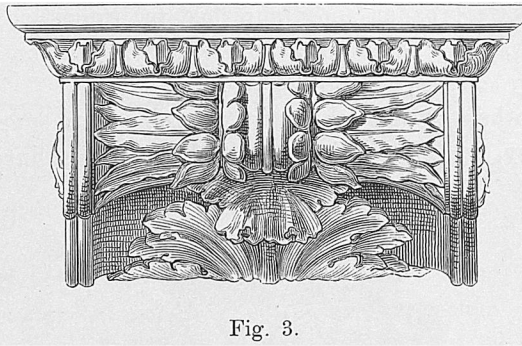


Fig. 3.

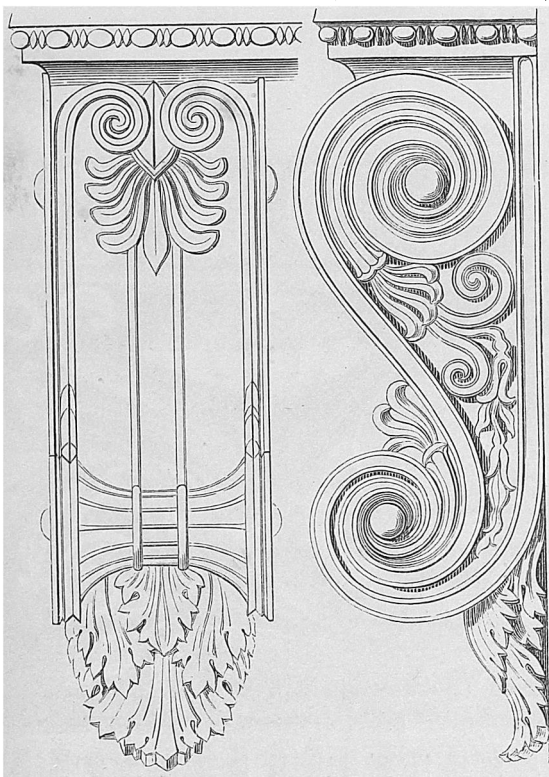


Fig. 4.

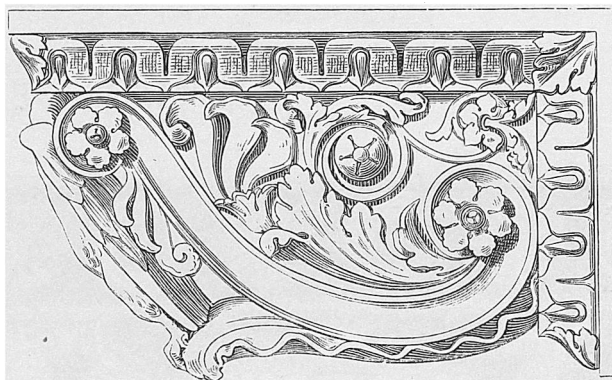


Fig. 5.

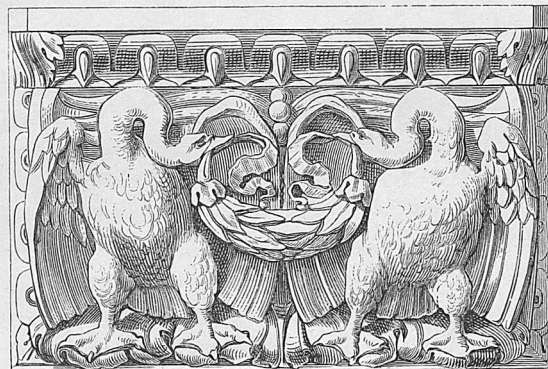


Fig. 5.

- Fig. 1. Cornice from the temple of Minerva at Priene.
 Fig. 2. Cornice with consoles from the frontispiece of Nero.
 Fig. 3. Console of a cornice of corinthian order.
 Fig. 4. Console supporting cornice of door from the Erechteium.
 Fig. 5. Console from the museum of the Vatican.

first predominant, gradually fell into great disuse. The acanthus leaf often gives place to a richer ornament, and the upper moulding reaches even to the border of the corona. At last the deterioration reached even to the forms of the volutes. This perverted taste even goes so far as to invert the double spiral so that the smaller volute takes the place of the other. In the raking cornice the dentil-band is cut obliquely according to the angle of the pediment, while the consoles are horizontal.

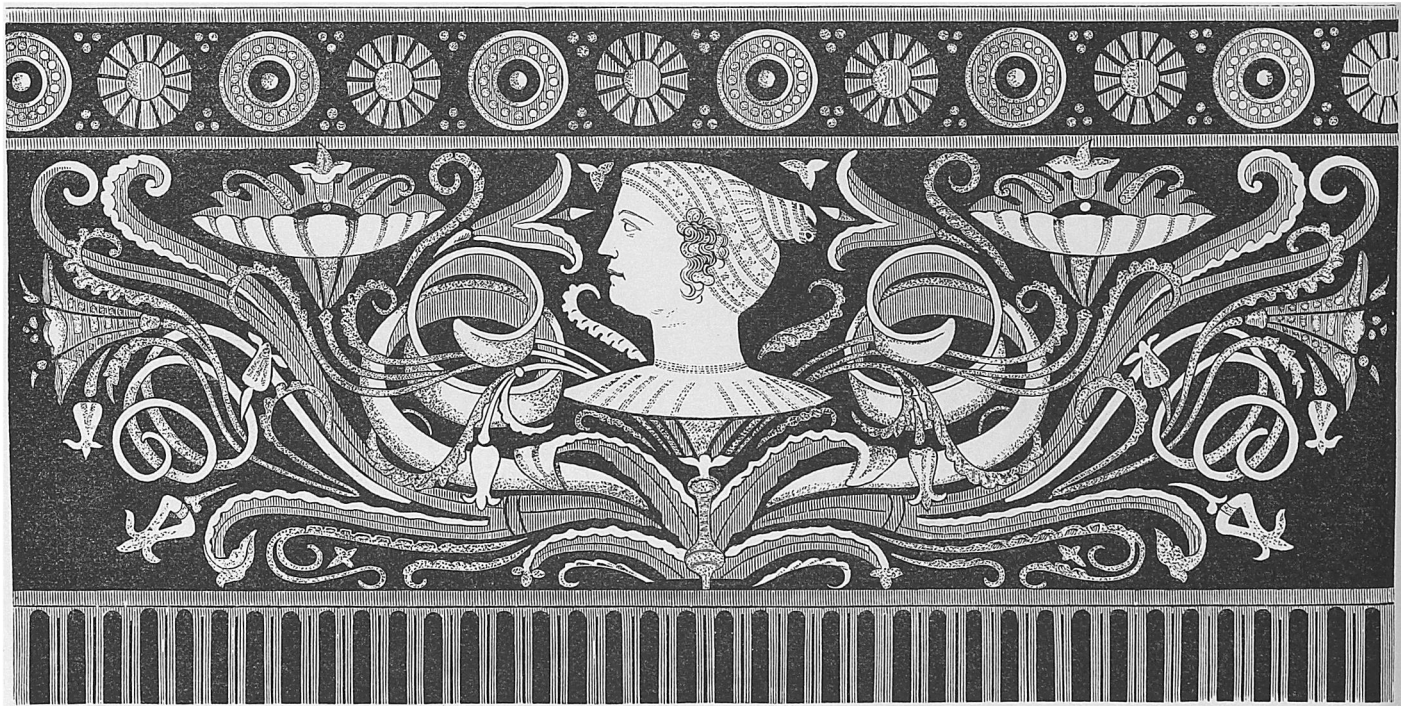
Besides these applications of the volute Console we find among the Romans another, which is unquestionably peculiar to them, the keystone console of an arch, which certainly was never so used by the Greeks. This Console is similar to those supporting door cornices, only that the back is broader and diminished in proportion to the voussoirs, and the lower acanthus leaf is horizontal and generally carries a small figure.

Another application of the Console as a support to a balcony, is, like the balcony itself, of Roman invention.

The volume of it is larger, as it is not only very wide but also particularly high. Fig. 5, shows a beautiful specimen of such a one, in which we notice as especially successful the design of the connecting curve of the vigorous volutes which show great breadth of design, suggesting the great weight to be supported by them. The two swans correspond to the above mentioned figure of the keystone console. In the later Roman period still more upright consoles support the pillars of corbelled-out galleries. In the same period are found also consoles of baked clay and brick work. Drawings from Pompeii prove the existence even of Consoles of bronze. In the interiors of ancient houses we meet with Consoles of stucco and painted imitations, which are not mere copies of the ordinary forms, but display extraordinarily free and fantastic shapes to which in such a case there can be no objection.

(To be continued.)

SPECIMENS OF ORNAMENTATION.



No. 1.

No. 1. Ornament of Antique Vase, in the Pinacothek Collection, Munich.
White, brown and buff ornament on black ground; head white and buff.